

Frequently Asked Questions

Proposed Rule to Increase Quotas for Red Snapper in the Gulf of Mexico and Potentially Re-open the Recreational Season for 2013

What would the rule do?

- The rule would increase the total allowable catch for the red snapper component of the reef fish fishery from 8.46 million pounds (mp) to 11.0 mp. The commercial and recreational sector quotas would be 5.61 mp for commercial and 5.39 mp for recreational.
- The rule may also re-open the recreational season in October 2013, if unused quota is available.

Why can the quotas be increased?

- A recent assessment for red snapper showed the population can support higher catches. The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council's (Council) Scientific and Statistic Committee determined the acceptable biological catch could be increased to 13.5 mp for 2013, the highest level since 1996.
- The acceptable biological catch is the scientific calculation of the sustainable harvest level for a species. The Council must set the allowable catch at or below the acceptable biological catch level.
- The acceptable biological catch was increased for 2013 because recent large year classes of fish have attained harvestable size.

Why isn't the quota higher?

- The assessment showed that the number of fish reaching harvestable size in 2014 and 2015 will be less. Therefore, the acceptable biological catches and the quotas for those would need to be lower if the 2013 quota is set to high.
- The Council determined red snapper fishermen would benefit more from a constant quota over the next three years, rather than a decreasing quota. Projections show that an 11 mp total allowable catch for 2013 will allow the quotas in 2014 and 2015 to remain constant or increase.
- Public testimony at the Council's June meeting supported this position.

Why is the re-opening of the recreational season only "potential"?

- The supplemental season is dependent on availability of unused quota. Recreational fishing was allowed in federal waters June 1-28, 2013. If landings exceeded the quota during that time, the excess would be subtracted from the additional quota proposed in this rule.
- In addition, several Gulf states have regulations in state waters that are not compatible with federal regulations and allow a higher level of catch. Although projections included this information, predicting the magnitude of those additional catches is difficult.

What would be the dates of the supplemental recreational season?

- The Council has requested the recreational season re-open starting October 1, 2013.
- Preliminary projections show fishing could be supported for 21 days, but only if landings did not exceed the previous quota during the June season.
- The June landings will be available in mid-August and NOAA Fisheries will announce the dates of the supplemental season, if quota is available, in the final rule for this action.

When will commercial individual fishing quota (IFQ) shareholders receive their additional allocation?

- The increase in quota would be distributed to IFQ shareholders on or shortly after the effective date of the final rule. This is expected to be around October 1, 2013.
- The additional quota would be distributed based on each participant's share holdings.
- IFQ participants would have until the end of the year to use the additional allocation.

What other red snapper regulations are fishery managers considering?

- The Gulf of Mexico Fishery Management Council is exploring a number of alternative management options, including:
 - A regional recreational management strategy that would delegate some aspects of decision making to the Gulf coast states to provide greater flexibility at the local level while still meeting overall conservation objectives;
 - Reallocating all or some portion of future catch limit increases between the commercial and recreational sectors (the current allocation is 51% commercial and 49% recreational);
 - A days-at-sea program for the for-hire sector;
 - An intersector trading program; and
 - A recreational fish tag program.

Where can I find more information on the red snapper fishery?

- For more information on *Red Snapper, Past, Present and Future*, please visit http://sero.nmfs.noaa.gov/sustainable_fisheries/gulf_fisheries/red_snapper/index.html.